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Crisis and change in Indonesia

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Rape, Race, and Reporting

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Moments of political violence may appear shatteringly similar in their grim outcome and in the sheer physicality of the destruction they inflict. Yet these moments, even those regarded as spontaneous outbursts, are shaped by each society's particular history and myths of collective identity and are energized by sedimented memories of threats to the collectivity.

(Coronil and Skurski, 1991:289)

Political rapes, like other rapes, are notoriously difficult as a subject of reporting and critical analysis for observers, not to speak of their experience for victims. This is especially true when the subject is unfamiliar territory for the analysts, as the case of May 1998 has been to many Java-based or Jakarta-biased Indonesians, myself included. These are all obvious points. One bitter implication I wish to consider here is that the state apparatuses are not able, even if they were willing, to satisfy the public demand to investigate the May 1998 case thoroughly, and hold the culprits responsible, in ways that follow the official procedures and meet the conventional standards of justice and truth.

The May 1998 rapes opened a new chapter in the history of Indonesia's political violence. Although not the first incident of its kind in the centre of the state political space, it appeared to have no resonance in the memory of a large portion of the population, including those actively involved in the case.¹

¹ Much of the June 1946 edition of the Chinese Indonesian-oriented and Jakarta-based *The Star Weekly* was devoted to coverage of political violence, including sexual atrocities against both male and female ethnic Chinese in several towns of West Java. The Federation of Chinese Associations in Batavia (*Chung Hua Tsung Hui*) published a 'Memorandum', detailing various forms of human rights abuses against the Chinese communities in Java from coast to coast before and after the Dutch Police-action on 21 July 1947. In the sense of their timing, these incidents took place in war situations that distinguish them from what happened in May 1998. The importance of this difference will be elucidated in the section 'Significance of Form'. I am thankful to Stanley Y Adi for the information and historical documents pertaining to the incidents in 1946-1947, which have receded in the public memory and debates in Suharto's New Order. One minor exception is the recent mention by *Tempo* (1998a) of a journalistic account of the killings and rapes against the Chinese population in Tangerang in the first week of June 1946, derived from *The Star Weekly* 23 June 1946. I cannot say anything substantive about these past incidents in the present discussion, because to do so would require a serious further investigation.

For that reason, the incident shocked many Indonesians who were neither prepared nor equipped to respond. The magnitude of causes and effects of the event proved to be far greater and more complex than first estimated by most of Jakarta's middle class urbanites, including well-reputed human rights activists who sought to bring some sort of justice to the crime. For separate reasons, the event has also received unprecedented scale of international reaction, often with no recognition of past and present cases elsewhere.²

This essay consists of four parts. The first, covering several sections, is a series of novice attempts at coming to grips analytically with the various difficulties of speaking of the subject both in general terms and with specific reference to the case of May 1998 in Indonesia. If the apparent novelty of the crime is responsible for its unfamiliarity and difficulty, it is important then to ask why and how it could have taken place where, when and in the manner it did. The next section will attempt to answer these questions by elaborating and qualifying that apparent novelty. Having considered these difficulties in the first two sections of the essay, the third presents an account of the resultant predicament that Jakarta-based human rights and women's groups encountered. The essay will conclude with a modestly optimistic section, highlighting some of the unintended effects and achievements of the various social groups in response to the May 1998 violence, with special reference to questions of ethnicity.

The general difficulties of dealing with political rapes derive from the prevalent political inequality, violence, and sexual oppression under which specific occasions of sexual assault take place. These broader and long-standing circumstances are related to but distinguishable from the actual rapes. Sexual assaults, such as rapes, can never be adequately understood in isolation from the prevailing structural violence, as well as the 'particular history and myths of collective identity and... sedimented memories of threats to the collectivity' in the societies concerned (Coronil and Skurski, 1991:289).

Such interlocking relationships between pervasive and sedimented structures and the more visible aspects of actual rapes were evident in Jakarta in mid-May 1998. Politico-economic frameworks have been dominant in the

There are alarming estimated rates of contemporary rapes in Jakarta, most of which have no political motives or significance. Political rapes in selected troubled areas of Aceh, East Timor and West Irian were already common and widely-reported. But until May 1998 most Java-residing Indonesians would not imagine similar events could take place in Jakarta. We will return to this point later.

² The status of the May 1998 rapes is worth comparing with that of the Santa Cruz incident on 12 November 1991, when Indonesian soldiers gunned down unarmed student protesters in the presence of American and British journalists. In both cases, the violence was not the first, perhaps not even the worst occurrence, but it drew an unprecedented scale of attention worldwide for various reasons that require a separate discussion elsewhere.

various analyses and explanation of the causes, significance and consequences of the May 1998 event. As an alternative, this essay will offer a close examination of selected moments of history, memories and sense of collective identity in addressing many of these questions. Additionally, attention will be given to the broader context. For want of a better term, this context is called a condition of vulgar masculinist post-colonial state power. This refers to power relations, marked by (a) the spectacularity of masculine excessive violence; (b) intense pain and widespread fear inflicted upon selected victims and the social groups they were seen to represent; (c) the immunity of the perpetrators from legal prosecution; (d) and the redundancy of such violence for any political or material gain to the perpetrators.³

A most disturbing fact about the political rapes in Jakarta, as elsewhere, is the paucity of hope for any meaningful restitution, or legal recourse for the victims. No authoritative and effective discourse is yet available for the victims and their sympathisers to air protest, seek/offer consolation, or analyse the crime critically. No trial will likely proceed from the May 1998 events. Even if such trial were to proceed, no independent, impartial and credible investigation could take place. Attempts to investigate the incident in Indonesia or to offer counselling assistance to the victims have been met with systematic suspicion, intimidation and retaliation. While attempts to seek justice for the May 1998 rapes seem to end in an impasse, these attempts have marked a new chapter in the nation's intertwining histories of race, gender and polity.

Gendered violence: heroic male, stigmatised female

Sexual violence, especially rape against women, belongs to a category of violence quite different from many other politically-motivated physical abuses. Contemporary Indonesia has witnessed two well-publicised incidents of political violence that demonstrated the contrast vividly. Only a few weeks prior to the initial revelation of mass rapes in mid-May 1998, the Indonesian public was stunned by reports of the disappearances of pro-democracy activists. After months of anxiety and speculation, some of these activists reappeared in states of mental exhaustion and intense fear. It took considerable courage on their part, Pius Lustrilanang being the first and most famous of these victims, to break the silence and make public testimonies of the kidnapping and tortures they were subjected to.

³ See African scholar Achille Mbembe (1992) for an elaborate discussion of the idea of post-colonial vulgarity of power and violence. It is curious that academics across the continents have been drawn to engage in debates on 'Asian values', but not on 'Asian violence'. Exception are scholars of South Asia whose contribution to theorising political violence has been considerable.

For months the case captured the nation's attention, because of the dramatic qualities of the event. Meanwhile, as many as 14 other activists remained missing. There are reasons to suspect that the series of kidnappings had links not only with the chaos in May 1998, but also with several other cases of political violence that rampaged through Indonesia in 1998. It all began perhaps as early as 1996. However, there is a very important difference between the kidnapping and the raping that escapes most comparative comments. The bodily wounds of these activists—all of them males—were publicly endowed with a degree of political heroism. They constituted a new feather in the cap, marking successful survival of a political ordeal which these activists had undergone in the cause of an overdue political, economic, and mental *reformasi* (reformation). That is precisely what contrasts them from the injuries of rape victims.⁴

Most rape victims usually choose not to testify to their ordeals, or to disclose their identities and bodily injuries in public. Among the few who have done so, potential threats of stigmatisation and not heroism emanated from public exposition of sexually abused female bodies. When Pius Lustrilanang returned from an international tour of human rights campaigning, a cheering crowd met him at the airport in Jakarta. Print media published pictures of him being carried on the shoulders of his supporters. Nothing similar could happen with the female victims of rape in Pius Lustrilanang's Indonesia.

The reasons for that difference originate not in the fe/male bodies; rather they are to be traced in the socially and historically constructed values attributed to the bodies. These constructions operate in structures of feeling, morality, sensibility, or cultures of gender and sexual oppression. Two words that express such structures are female 'virginity' and 'chastity'. Through the ages the male-dominated world has demanded that females have only one sexual relationship with the man to whom they are married legally.

The effectiveness of the sanctity of female virginity/chastity depends on reproduction of stigmas of illegitimate loss of virginity, or of promiscuity. Rapes are devastating to the victims not only because of whatever the rapists do to the bodies of the victims. The devastating effects of rapes emanate more broadly and insidiously from the violence that the world does (or what the victims not unreasonably believe that it does) to raped female bodies. Without this global, centuries old, institutionalised, and systematic gender discrimination, rapes would be only a little more serious than other tortures.

As a direct consequence of the above, rapes are distinguishable from other tortures in another sense. In contrast to tortured activists like Pius Lustrilanang, rape victims across societies tend to self-degrade, suffer extreme

⁴ See interview with Latin American feminist Maria Logones (Primadiantari, 1998) and my preliminary attempt to make similar comparisons (Heryanto, 1998b).

shame and lose self-worth quite independently of whether or not others look down on them. Individual cases of raping and rapists, therefore, are only part of the problem. Blaming or prosecuting rapists alone does little, if any, to help ease the sufferings of rape victims, or deter the potential continuity of rapes.

Men do not simply rape women. Under strong patriarchy, they dominate the construction of female sexuality, and hold women responsible for the sanctity of female virginity/chastity. They inflict violence on the sanctified sexuality, punish the victims for the consequent defects, and train the victims to self-punish further. In this light, women share something comparable with two social groups under Indonesia's New Order regime that have been constructed and abused on the basis of race and ideology. The first is those labelled *nonpribumi* (non-indigenous), or of Chinese descent. The second includes those who are officially labelled 'un-clean', the stigma of hundreds of thousands of citizens who were suspected of membership in the then legal Communist Party, or affiliation with, sympathy for, or kinship relations with any such individuals.⁵ Attacks on these stigmatised individuals have been both regular and regulated. These attacks, even when performed merely for their own sake, have had few legal or moral consequences, because the victims do not have a legitimate voice to air grievances in public. They are lucky if no blame and insult is directed towards them after the attack. Understandably, females who are of Chinese descent have been doubly defenceless targets for rapes under Indonesia's New Order.

Many rape victims tend to make responses that set them apart from other victims of violence. Due to shame and fear of stigmatisation, many rape victims choose to run away secretly from home and attempt to lead new life in distant places, sometimes with new identities, and often with no intention to return. Others try to overcome the trauma by forgetting the violence, or denying that the sexual violence had taken place at all. This further explains why truth and justice related to rapes cannot be easily pursued by journalistic, legalistic, or academic investigators.

Like rape victims, their families and sympathisers, the nine kidnapped pro-democracy activists received threats against making public testimonies before their release. If the rape victims were not to speak up in public for years, perhaps decades, as the heroic male activists did, the reason would not be simply those explicit threats. Many of these victims were speechless even with their own families. Speech problems related to rapes do not belong solely to the raped females. Concerned members of their immediate families often do not know how to ask any questions of them.

While differences between the victimisation brought about by torture and rape may be universal, a few things about the Indonesian context deserve

⁵ In one important difference, selected Chinese businessmen enjoyed special privileges provided by the state officials. The final section will elaborate this point.

further discussion. One of them is the near breakdown of legal justice. In contrast to the rape cases, the contemporary political kidnapping cases were able to come up with adequate evidence, witnesses and pressure to be brought to trial. In spite of this, there has been no sign that the judicial apparatus is seriously interested in probing into the matter. What semblance of justice can we imagine will be pursued under the present circumstances in Indonesia in the interests of the rape victims? What reasons do rape victims of May 1998 in Jakarta have to believe that testifying would in any way be constructive?

The recent political kidnapping is by no means the only nor the worst political crime that has enjoyed legal immunity in contemporary Indonesia. The country's judiciary has a huge backlog of overdue cases. There has been no less pressure for a legal probing of the shootings of student demonstrators in May and November 1998; of the legality of the acquisition of wealth by former president Suharto, his children, and his cronies; of the violence and political rapes in Aceh and East Timor; of the mass killings of alleged convicts in 1983; and of a host of crimes surrounding the 1965–66 succession to power.

In the next few sections, I will continue to explore some of the less obvious difficulties in dealing with the sexual assaults of May 1998. Before that, let me highlight a few points from the foregoing that will be of relevance to the remainder of this essay. First, in most cases of rape we are left with a huge silence and absence at the centre of the issue. Rapists and raped, being equally legitimate sources of knowledge about what actually happened, do not usually give us their accounts, for obvious though opposite reasons. Paradoxically, in the face of such silence/absence, there is a prolific production of competing narratives concerning what might have happened and what such events might mean. This is especially true in political rapes, which are by definition a public event.

This is not to undervalue the potential merits of the many circulated, contested narratives. While it is important to take many of such narratives seriously, there are limits that must be admitted. These limits are not necessarily reflective of flaws of individual narrators. They are ultimately attributable to the peculiarity of the subject matter, the silences, absences and denials discussed above.

While empirical data on what happened is something that we cannot do without, it is necessary to examine the broader social contexts of the incidents, details of which will never be fully accessible to us. Studying the broader issues of why and how women (or ethnic Chinese, or ex-communists) have been made defenceless is equally important as amassing details of individual cases of the abuse of already disempowered subjects. Such broader perspectives allow us to scrutinise the diverse narratives, and recognise the significance of the bits and pieces of empirical details available to us.

Finally, while maximum effort to find those responsible for the assaults is morally imperative, under the present circumstances pursuance of justice through legal channels is very problematic. The current justice system suffers from such a serious lack of credibility that any attempt to seek legal justice for the rape cases may do further damage rather than benefit the victims. While the work of women's groups and pro-democracy activists in response to the May 1998 violence is highly commendable, and their current achievements impressive, it is advisable to be cognisant of the severe constraints that impede their efforts.

Problematising silence, contesting narratives

The silence and absence of the rape victims in May 1998 pose a remarkably difficult challenge to many professionals in the production and dissemination of truth and justice, some of whom have antagonistic relations with each other: NGO activists, journalists, academic researchers, police and public attorneys. Many of these largely male-dominated professions compete to obtain the first, the most comprehensive detailed, and most authoritative information pertaining to the case in the name of truth and justice. Some people who work purely on a voluntary basis may be exempted from institutional pressures, but emotional engagement and sensitivity may render numbing effects on them.

While an in-depth investigation is a legitimate responsibility of these professionals, and while sincere sympathy for the victims may have motivated their investigation, the painful utterances of testimony they seek from the victims offer greater potential benefits to these professionals than to the victims themselves. The risks involved in such testimony would weigh more heavily, if not exclusively, on the victims. While the imbalance of relations of power in the production of truth and justice is not the creation of the professionals, it is something that they appear not to have always respected.⁶

Friendships among fellow NGO activists were occasionally threatened because of failure to share confidentially collected data about the rape victims. Antagonism has been much worse between NGO activists and law-enforcement officials. With years of experience and credentials, selected human rights groups claimed to have authentic testimonies of the rape cases in their possession, but refused to disclose them to the state officials without the consent of their sources. These officials claimed that in order to proceed with due legal process, they could not simply accept what the activists reported. They needed adequate, credible and authentic evidence that they claimed was either non-existent or inaccessible. Politically loaded, the impasse of the May

⁶ In a private communication with me, a feminist activist recalled her disgust upon hearing a journalist friend state proudly to her that after a long search, he managed at last to meet a victim of the May 1998 rapes.

1998 rapes generated animosity with no easy resolution. One crucial element embroiled in the disputes was a dominant discourse on production of truth, to which we must return in a later section.

Some observers, male and female, made sincere pleas of encouragement to the victims of the 1998 Jakarta rapes to break their silence and make history (Sarwono, 1998). They argued that breaking the chain of women's oppression requires breaking the silence of rape victimisation. As things stand now, there is no easy way to judge what victims should or should not do, or what their sympathetic observers should or should not recommend. Each position is as fragile as its counter-argument.

Both the victims and these professionals can slip into a potentially no win situation. Questions of motive aside, for these professionals to pressure the victims to break their silence may constitute a fresh torture and violence, while passively preserving the victims' silence can be construed as serious professional negligence, if not protecting the culprits. One way out is perhaps to review each case individually and periodically. There is no general rule for what is possible and desirable for the breaking of such silence. In view of this, the next section is devoted to examining some of the historical specificities of the May 1998 rape cases.

Apart from the universal silence and silencing of the raped females, a number of analytical problems impede critical analysts' ability to articulate key issues. The list can begin with the seemingly simple but crucial question: what term if any can best describe the specificities of sexual assaults in mid-May 1998 in Jakarta? While the word 'rape' is highly communicative, hence my use of it in the preceding sections for convenience, it is far from adequate to capture complexities of central importance for critical analysis. 'Victims' is another term that is more problematic than often acknowledged.

In the absence of agreed and appropriate concepts, disputes over the number of rape cases and number of victims are predictable. But I raise the issue of terminology not to focus on quantification of the rapes and victims, or to propose any more accurate designations or figures. Rather, my purpose is to illuminate another set of problems in which questions of terminology are embedded and crucial. These include the alleged complicity of state agents, the fate of the campaigns for human and women's rights, as well as historical change in discourses on, Chinese ethnic minority.

Multiple identities

The word 'rape' denotes a generic and abstract notion of sexual violence, usually with implicit reference to male perpetrators inflicting violence against women. Yet whatever their validity in describing the May incidents, those gender categories were precisely not at the core of the heated controversies which followed these events in Indonesia in 1998. As we know, ethnic or racial categories (which are not distinguished in many of these controversies)

and latterly religious differences were more prominent in the reactions to the incident than those of gender in the ensuing months, both inside and outside Indonesia.

Despite disagreements over various details, most observers agreed that the alleged sexual violence targeted primarily Chinese females of diverse ages, while the perpetrators were non-Chinese Indonesians, or the so-called *pribumi* (indigenous).⁷ It would be difficult to resist the temptation to agree with the general belief that ethnic hatred had motivated the violence, with or without added hostility based on economic, class or religious differences. But this accepted fact alone does not evince that the assaults were chiefly motivated by racism. As I have argued elsewhere, it would be more tenable to describe it as a racialised, rather than racist act (Heryanto, 1998c).

While the ethnic dimension is a valid variable for analysis, ethnisation of the violence is emphasised out of proportion in the many analyses and media coverage. To analyse the incident in Jakarta exclusively or primarily in ethnic terms is neither accurate nor fair. Not only does it downplay gender issues, it also overlooks another pair of antipodal categories, namely the militarist 'state' and civilian 'society'. Assorted testimonies and preliminary investigation findings consistently suggest two profiles of the rapists and instigators of the mass looting and burning. One of these groups appears to consist of militarily-trained males, and the other appears to comprise various goons whose army-connected participation in previous violent incidents has been a public secret for many years.

In the above I have already identified the interplay of three axes of social dichotomies that are at work, or commonly believed to be at work, in the violence in May 1998: male/female, *pribumi*/Chinese ethnic, and state/society. While overlap among them is highly plausible, each of these dichotomised categories has its own histories and trajectories. One is not easily reducible to another, and altogether they are not reducible to one grand dichotomy (masculine *pribumi*-dominated state versus helpless female citizens of Chinese descent). This is why there can be different narratives of the event, each positing different implications, emphasising different significance, and incriminating different agents and interests at stake. It is not enough to argue that the May 1998 event involved several elements with their own energies and directions, gender, polity, and ethnicity. Such an argument does not explain the relationships and potential hierarchy among them. Is one element central, dependent, subordinate or conditional on the existence of others? In the competing perceptions the ethnic dimension has clearly dominated the gender or political issues. It would take another essay to discuss why this is so.

⁷ Journalist Susan Sim (1998) reported her meeting in Bali with a non-Chinese rape victim from the ugly situation in Jakarta.

Confusing and murky as the above description may have been, it has not yet portrayed the whole complexity of the event and its subsequent reporting. I have not brought the question of social class into the picture, partly because it does not register strongly in public debates on the event. This is not to argue that we can overlook or belittle it. Instead of class categories, Islam/non-Islam identity politics came to prominence in the months following the incident. It is hard to say that religious conflicts play any more important role than those of class, or to see them as completely separable.⁸

Significance of form

Students of political violence have observed that political violence is never the same in its form and significance, notwithstanding some substantive similarities in the destruction it causes. To account for political violence mainly in terms of its physical and quantified destruction is to miss the point. The inadequacy of the term 'rape' in reference to what happened in mid-May 1998 is illuminated not only by the multiple, conflicting, and overlapping identities of those involved, and their distinguishable interests. The familiar term 'rape' is incapable of showing some of the remarkable features about the violence in question. While the term 'gang rape' is more useful than 'rape', it, too, fails to express many aspects of the reported violence in Jakarta. A closer examination of the form of the violence is necessary to direct analytical focus to what is most crucial. In contrast to the racial theory, examination of the form of May 1998 violence suggests the possible operation of militarist state terrorism.

Some of the most striking features of the sexual violence are its massive scale, its simultaneity, uniform pattern, despite the wide geographical areas that it covered, and the ease with which was accomplished. Here figures do matter, but not by themselves. According to various authoritative reports, between 50 to 150 females were raped multiple times in the two days of 13–14 May 1998 across a city of 10 million inhabitants. The violence followed a highly uniform pattern, without any obstruction from security

forces. While open to further verification, the features of such widespread reports leave little doubt about the narrow range of potential suspects.⁹

Not many individuals or social groups had the capacity, even if they had the unlikely desire, to conduct systematic violence of such magnitude, with such effectiveness and 'professional' style. In fact, one may argue that not many military-trained officers have such capacity. Public suspicion of the responsibility of special troops within the army has been reinforced by a series of reports of other cases of violence. The most immediately related is the broader mass violence against Chinese and Chinese-owned properties in the same areas and period of the mass rapes, characterised by similarly effective organisation, professional style, ease and scale. Almost at the same period there was a flow of reports of highly comparable violence and rapes by the Indonesian troops in Aceh and East Timor from several years earlier. Poor cover-ups had meanwhile tarnished the security and law-enforcement apparatuses in the emotionally-charged cases of shooting against peaceful student demonstrators, and the kidnapping of pro-democracy activists.

More than a few commentators have compared the Jakarta rapes with those in other areas during wars.¹⁰ Others, including myself, have some reservations about such comparison for various reasons. True, there are valid comparable elements to be made: racially-defined victims, mass destruction of property, heavy involvement of military officers, or militarily-trained civilians, and circumstances of political crisis. Like other comparisons, however, this one has limitations, and must not be overdrawn. In conditions of war or other situations affected by overt military aggressive operations (as in Bosnia, Cambodia, Burma or Aceh) the general population and potential victims of rape would at least be alerted to the probability of such sexual assaults, and thus be better prepared.

In most of these troubled areas there was usually an official articulation of goals to be achieved, or rewards to be gained after or beyond the destruction of the female bodies: a territorial occupation, peace and stability, or suppression of dissent. In theory at least, the party under attack has the option to defend, resist, negotiate, avoid or surrender and hand over what the aggressor wants. The May 1998 situation in Jakarta and other destroyed cities was characterised precisely by an absence or lack of these defined goals and rewards. Hence, in contrast to many war rapes, no military forces claimed to be responsible for the atrocities in May 1998, nor did they make any serious attempt to stop them. The literature of war rapes seems therefore not precisely

⁸ Some self-proclaimed Islamic groups close to the late Suharto and Habibie regimes alleged that the rape reports were either fabricated or exaggerated by some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to defame Islam, and the nation. How much this allegation has been fashioned in response to the leading position of Catholic Father Sandiawan in the Voluntary Team for Humanity needs further investigation. On separate occasions, Sandiawan's religious background was invoked in journalistic attacks with religious overtones. Similar style attacks have been directed by the same groups against massive pro-democracy movements in Jakarta whose social, sexual, religious, racial, or ethnic identities are remarkably heterogeneous. Close allies of President Habibie promoted the notion in public that campuses of Christian colleges have been the main bastion of these anti-government protests.

⁹ It is not surprising that in early November 1998 the government-appointed Fact Finding Joint Team made a recommendation to court martial two generals and probe further into a meeting at the Army Strategic Command Headquarters (MAKOSTRAD) on 14 May 1998.

¹⁰ See Arivia (1998) and Suryakusuma (1998).

relevant to our present discussion. A term, an alternative to 'war rapes', is called for. Thus my provisional and reluctant use of the term 'political rapes'.

Elsewhere I mentioned 'racialised state-terrorism' in reference to the overall event in Jakarta, in which gang rapes were an integral part (Heryanto, 1998c). I was reacting to the over-ethnisation of the incident in most of the dominant media reports. For the present discussion, such a phrase is not very helpful, as it fails to highlight the gender dimension of the incident. It also overlooks the complicity of non-state agencies and institutions in the crime. Several reports contain testimonies that some of the gang rapes in public places were watched by cheering crowds, as happened with the burning of Chinese-owned houses and properties. Yet as well as these indications of 'racist' sentiments, many of the same reports contain accounts of *pribumi* strangers risking their own safety to offer sanctuary to potential Chinese victims.

It would, therefore, be more tenable to argue that there were conceivably several distinguishable but interacting genres of violence in May 1998 (economically motivated, politically-driven, festivity-making, racial hatred, and so on). The Fact Finding Joint Team (1998) identified at least three groups of 'rioters'. These were the professionalised instigators (some with telecommunication devices) who were strangers to locals. Once the crowd in one locale was in motion, these instigators moved to another neighborhood and repeated the instigation. There were also the angry mobs, also outsiders to the neighbourhoods under attack, who supported the provocateurs, and took advantage of the chaotic situation. Finally there were local residents who were onlookers-turned-participants. These people later became the main casualties in burnt buildings. State-terrorism was thus not the only factor in these events. Yet it played not only an initial, but also a central and dominant role in the overall incidents.

Finally, there are further complexities relating to the term rape or gang rape, even with the qualifier 'state-sponsored and racialised'. Various reports indicate cases where harmful objects (metal rods, broken bottles, or barb wires) were used by perpetrators to injure the reproductive organs of the female victims. These are not cases of rapes as we usually understand the term. But terms like 'sexual assault' or 'torture' understate the significance of the ferocious act and the extent of the sense of moral degradation and violation that the victims endure. The eventual effect on the victims may be no different from that of rape.

Many of the victims suffered both genital rape as well as object penetrations. Some fainted during the attack and could never ascertain what, or what combination of things, had invaded their sexual organs. When they regained consciousness they had neither the ability nor interest in specifying what exactly had caused the pain. Should these cases be termed rapes, because the victims regarded and experienced them as such? What about cases where

attackers coerced members of the victims' families, male servants, or drivers to perform sexual assault on women? Are these cases rape of the same or different order from the others?¹¹

We have not seen enough public debate on the roots and implications of many of these problems, including the silences, the use of terms, underlying concepts, and structural oppression of patriarchy. Thus, the short-lived controversy on the sales of anti-rape corsets soon after the May 1998 atrocities did not develop into anything radically enlightening about gender subordination.

Mediated victimisation

Equally difficult is the question of the number and classification of victims. Political rapes, as previously described, victimise a lot more people than the selected females upon whose bodies the rapists directly inflict physical contact by force. I propose that such victims in May 1998, whose numbers remain debatable but roughly range between 50 and 150, be identified as 'primary' or 'chief' victims.

As spectacles, political rapes are displayed for public consumption and the reproduction of fear in both private and public in the form of gossip, speculation, interviews, nightmares and household conversations. Political rapes, like all political violence, are statement making. They involve some sort of authorship, medium, message, genre, style and intended audience. The raped bodies are a sort of medium—comparable to walls vandalised with graffiti—on which the perpetrators inscribe messages directed towards an audience larger than those females directly assaulted.¹²

This implied audience constitute 'secondary' victims, whose precise number, identity and mediated process of victimisation is never clear or static. They expand and contract. They diffuse, fluctuate and oscillate. Despite their nebulous identities, two large social groups were most susceptible to secondary victimisation in the Indonesia's current context. The first is those

¹¹ Under the existing penal code, only genital penetration by males of females other than their wives is recognised as rape. Women's groups in Indonesia have long demanded a revision of this code, but so far to no avail.

¹² I am not the first to propose such a semiotic reading of the May 1998 incident. Feminists of the Indonesian Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy in public discussions compared the raping of Chinese females in May 1998 to the lowering and tearing of enemy's flags in wars (see *Republika*, 1998; *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, 1998). Such comparisons have not, however, been elaborated to enable a more rigorous analysis of the historical coding and decoding of the significance of flying flags and abusing female sexuality in relation to the formation of masculine state violence and national identity.

who bear the stigma of being *nonpribumi* (non-indigenous) or of Chinese ethnicity, and the other is females, who make up half of the population.

No accurate or complete list of those who potentially and actually become extended or secondary (or tertiary) victims can be recorded and reported. What we have are fragmented testimonies and reports of the partially visible subjects. Involuntary witnesses of the atrocities who were caught in traffic jams, and encountered the incidents in the streets, as well as companions and relatives of the primary victims who were coerced to watch or to participate in the horrible crime, may have to suffer traumas for many years to come.

Coercing fellow victims to witness or to participate in inflicting violence is a standard practice in wars. The Indonesian public now has increased access to similar reports on details of the massacres of 1965–66, as well political violence in Aceh, West Irian and East Timor in more recent periods. Less known, perhaps, is the fact that such practices may be found in military training, especially among the newly recruited males at young ages.¹³ To torture someone by making him/her see or hear others being tortured is a standard method used by the police and military officers to intimidate, without injuring, urban middle class political detainees in Indonesia and perhaps elsewhere. With less politically privileged inmates, torturers have made one inmate inflict violence upon his/her fellow inmates, making both suffer. Failure to understand these techniques of conducting torture, instilling fear, and constructing masculinity may lead to the kind of confusion expressed in the following statement reported by aid worker Ita Fatia Nadia (1998.3):

After accidentally witnessing a Chinese girl being gang raped, my younger sister was so paranoid and distressed. She talked nonsense, her body shook whenever someone approached her. She was hospitalised for two weeks. I am still wondering whether she was only witnessing the rape or being raped herself. How can she be so badly affected?

There is no stable or clear boundary between being a witness and a victim in political violence. The case of May 1998 is no exception, and yet it is only to be expected that many of the witnesses-cum-victims are excluded in the numerical calculation of victims. Even NGO activists who had insisted on seeking truth and offering first aid to primary victims have reportedly suffered emotionally because of what they came to hear and see. Do they qualify to be called (voluntary) 'victims'? There are scattered reports of individuals who

¹³ See a recently circulated report on the recruitment and training of Burmese military soldiers who have been responsible for professional gang rapes (Apple, 1998). Although whatever happened in Burma may not immediately explain what happened in Indonesia, similarities between the military forces in the two countries may go beyond the Burmese military junta's pronounced desire to emulate their Indonesian counterparts. I am grateful to Sriprapha Petcharamesree for the report on the Burmese military rapes.

suffered from psychological and sexual problems after extended consumption of graphic reports in the mass media, including the internet. While the media audience members may reside hundreds of kilometres away from the actual rapes in Jakarta, the mediated effects of the May 1998 violence in Jakarta are embodied in flesh and blood. They are 'real' and not merely virtual. This victimisation is also deliberately intended, not simply an associated excess.¹⁴

Being targets of mediated victimisation, do these people have the legal rights to file a lawsuit and seek compensation? Rather than representing a hypothetical question, this issue came close to legal debate in a Jakarta court. On 16 July 1998 five NGOs representing victims of the May 1998 riots filed an unprecedented class action against top government officials for failure to prevent violence and protect their citizens.¹⁵ This representation was questioned by defence lawyers (see *Detektif & Romantika*, 1998b). If mediated victims are legally recognised as plaintiffs in their own right, then no questions of representation complicate matters.

Historicising the May 1998 political rapes

The preceding sections explore the various difficulties of seeking justice and truth about political rapes in general and those in Jakarta in May 1998 more specifically. Central to these difficulties is the unexpected nature of the rapes to those directly affected. If the event is indeed so novel, how could it have occurred in 1998? This section explores this issue by returning to the previously cited contention from Coronil and Skurski about the importance of examining 'particular history and myths of collective identity and...sedimented memories of threats to the collectivity'. In this section I wish to qualify the designation of political rapes as being a new phenomenon historically.

¹⁴ This is not to overstate or overgeneralise the efficacy of any political violence. The unprecedented international outcry of protest against the anti-Chinese rioting in Jakarta in 1998 is not attributable to the efficacy of the Jakarta-based state terrorism. These protests, however, reflected more than innocent solidarity for fellow humans or fellow diasporic Chinese as the protestors often claimed. I believe these protests had varied sources of energy and discourses from both global, as well as separate local and national historical developments in each of the protesters' places of residence. Budiawan Purwadi (1998) located the politico-economic geography of these protests on the Pacific Rim, and argued that the protests were ideological expressions of particular moments of global capitalism.

¹⁵ The five NGOs included Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa (SNB), Institut Sosial Jakarta (ISJ), Lembaga Studi dan Advokasi Masyarakat (ELSAM), Perhimpunan Bantuan Hukum dan Hak Asasi Manusia (PBHI), and Serikat Pengacara Indonesia (SPI). The accused were the President of the Republic of Indonesia, the Minister of Defence and Security/Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, the chief of Police, the Jakarta Regional Police Chief, and the Central Java Regional Police Chief.

The reproduction of gender subordination through sexual control (via rules of virginity/chastity) is neither new nor uniquely Indonesian. What appeared to be so abruptly novel in the May 1998 violence to the victims and their sympathisers, as repeatedly emphasised above, was the spectacular public display of violence directed against sanctified sites and rules of sexuality. While political rapes were a new encounter to both the victims and the implied audience to whom the spectacle was addressed, they are not so new to sections within the armed forces and the Indonesian population in outlying areas under Indonesian military surveillance. This observation has bearing upon attempts to explain the causes and directions of the May violence.

Economic crisis in the nation, and the consequent unemployment, hunger and desperation that hit the urban poor was often been invoked in the months following the May 1998 violence as the origin of pressures that created mass anger, and directed that anger towards the '3% of the population of Chinese descent who control 70% of the nation's economy' as the common epithet has it. This widely accepted scenario is problematic for several serious reasons. First and foremost, it imputes the crime to either an imagined collective mass that never existed, or innocent poor urbanites, many of whom had no voice to rebuke the accusation. Many of them lost their jobs or lives as a direct result of the burning. The economic racialised scenario exonerates the real culprits. It provides some sort of rationalisation, if not justification, to the racialised attacks based on seemingly scientific-sounding but dubious figures.¹⁶

It also fails to explain why the violence that raged in Jakarta in May 1998 did not take place in other cities like Semarang (one of the most Sinised and industrial cities in Java), Surabaya (the largest city and industrial area outside Jakarta, where a significant percentage of Chinese and a large number of industrial labourers reside), or Yogyakarta (a stronghold of pro-reformation radicals who were demanding the elimination of the New Order corruption, collusion, and nepotism which had given the Chinese their so-called '70%

¹⁶ I do not take issue with the exact numerical ratios of this ethnic population and its wealth, but with how figures have been used uncritically to validate a particular argument. A similar line of argument has been made repeatedly in public that a Jakarta male elite deserves a bigger slice of the state power because they profess the religion of the majority. What advocates of this thinking do not tell us is that women should control half of the state, or the rural peasants should hold the majority of the seats in cabinet or parliament, or the Chinese around the world should have access to the biggest slice of world's resources, on the basis of their sheer demographic dominance.

Even if the often cited ratio of 3% of the population and a 70% economic domination were accurate, it does not necessarily have any direct relevance to the unrest in May 1998. It can be as misleading as linking the political conflict and military abuse of human rights in East Timor to the 'facts' that Indonesia is predominantly a Muslim country while Catholicism is the religion of the majority in East Timor.

economic domination'). It is curious that anti-Chinese violence of greater proportion took place in Solo, where economic discrepancies were not a prominent issue, and the Chinese ethnic population was generally perceived to be better-integrated with the locals. Many of the economic explanations assume implicitly and incorrectly that the violence was largely conducted by local *pribumis* who took revenge against their Chinese neighbours. Various reports from independent bodies confirm by contrast that instigators came in mini buses from other cities. Informed observers have also argued that it took not only professional skills, but also military ammunition to burn the many thousands of concrete buildings.

Reliable reports from independent bodies also indicate two other important points that have been suppressed in the economic-based anti-Chinese racial theories. First, the violence in Jakarta took the lives of around 1,200 non-Chinese poor residents. Witnesses reported that many of them died from being burnt alive, and a few from gunfire. Second, several ethnic Chinese who were fortunate enough to have obtained shelter during the chaos made an acknowledgement that helping hands came from the economically poor urbanites (see Nadia, 1998; *Detektif & Romantika*, 1998a).

The above is not to deny both the economic discrepancies in the country, and the widespread racial antagonism. I simply want to question their often-made links to the May 1998 riot. There is a serious shortage of evidence to attribute the violence in May 1998 to the mass poverty and spontaneous racism. Rather than causing the rapes and riots, racism appeared to have escalated as the consequence of the rapes, riots and the racialising media coverage that propagated the economic-gap theory. In a similar vein, bureaucratic discrimination and anti-Chinese violence have been inflicted upon selected citizens not because they are of Chinese descent. Quite the reverse: discrimination, looting, burning and raping have been done repeatedly to produce and reproduce their Indonesian Chineseness, as externally imposed stigmas.¹⁷

Even if we were to suppose that in May 1998 the streets of Jakarta and Solo were full of angry, hungry and desperately anti-Chinese crowds, not burning, looting nor rapes would be inevitable. It would require some prior exposition, ideas or experiments, if not training, to transform this anger and hatred into any particular form of collective aggression. Without any precedent, and without a learning process, their action would turn into reckless, structureless and meaningless chaos. Not only raping of women but even less serious harassment (from slapping to verbal abuse) requires specific formal structures of practice, and signifies a range of social meanings beyond the individual aggressors' choice or invention.

¹⁷ For similar reasons Suharto's New Order had to stage a periodic anti-Communist witch-hunt in order to rejuvenate its reign. For more see Heryanto (1998a; 1998d).

Forms of violence, especially in the collective, are never uniform, spontaneous, natural or at random. The possible range of genres and even technical specificities of violence in any given society is not limitless. They are historically bound, and therefore signifying. For the masses in Jakarta, or anywhere else for that matter, to have the disposition and ability to turn into collective agents of 'spontaneous' mass violence, there must be prior ideas, desires, memories, imaginations, history, and perhaps experiments and experiences of doing so. Any of these, or their combination, work as directives in the absence of leadership.¹⁸

For several months after the May incident, especially during the month of July 1998, there were major and racial-blind lootings of agricultural and aquacultural products across Java (see *Forum Keadilan*, 1998a). These seemingly spontaneous acts of local residents were driven by economic desperation, informed by many years of prior discourse and practice. However, political gang raping appeared to be beyond the histories, discourses and imagination of the people in turbulent areas during the May 1998 violence. It is here that special troops within the armed forces occupied a unique position, being as it were the only social groups in the nation with ideas, training and history, if not personal experience, of political gang rapes in areas like Aceh and East Timor.

This is not to deny the epidemic of the more 'private' rapes in the nation, where rapists make efforts to cover up the crime they commit (see Prasetyo and Marzuki, 1997). It is also worth noting that despite their high rate, rapes are viewed by many Indonesians as a serious atrocity, sometimes more serious than murder. This sentiment manifests itself in everyday life more than in formal policies and legal documents. It is well-known in Indonesia that

¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu's widely-quoted notion of 'habitus' is helpful in delineating the point further:

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (1977:117).

Rioting and hooliganism after a soccer match or a rock music concert are good examples in Indonesia of a structured disposition of seemingly leaderless masses, orchestrated by a historical discursive practice without a human conductor. Indonesians' courtesy to strangers is as subject to historical construction as their familiarity with corruption or looting during anti-Chinese riots. These are part of their 'national' discursive resources that are durable but neither permanent nor essential.

prisoners convicted of rape are targets for private torture by other inmates. My observation during fieldwork in 1991 that involved regular visits to a prison in Central Java confirmed this. Weda (1998) gives further confirmation. Such treatment can be so bad that in one case it entailed death (see *Forum Keadilan*, 1998b).

If we have no hard evidence to prove that specific individuals or institutions within the military committed the gang rapes in May 1998, we have fairly strong reasons to doubt that the masses could have done it, even in the unlikely event they wished to do so. NGO activists have raised similar doubts on the basis of the efficacy and simultaneity of separate atrocities over a large area within a fairly short period. I agree with this conclusion, but for a different reason, as outlined above.

Although suggesting a high degree of complicity on the part of the state security apparatus in the riots, by no means do I imply that the violence was necessarily a product of an overt instruction from a commander, who was in charge of well-coordinated efforts to achieve well-defined aims. As we all know, the New Order's state power, which was greatly centralised and personalised, was already in disarray at the time of the riots.¹⁹

While it is crucial to recognise the unique experience and record of the Indonesian military's special troops with regard to political rapes, separating them from the rest of the population, it is equally important to add two things. Firstly, such distinction is not permanent. Novelty or innocence never is. Once (again) exposed to the occurrence of political rapes within their immediate environment, the Indonesian public, especially those living in urban Java, entered a new history, trauma, memory and collective narration. The 1998 incident provided a new and authorised vocabulary in speech, fantasy and practice. The strong racialisation of the May 1998 rapes in the generous media coverage made it possible for some of the ethnic majority to detach themselves emotionally from the horror, and to assign this genre of political violence to a specific group: Chinese females.

There were reports of individual rapes in Jakarta and several other cities weeks after the dust settled in ruined Jakarta. They appear to be spillover or residual cases. Such cases included an incident where a family driver kidnapped and raped his employer's 14 year old daughter, whom he had for years been taking to and fetching from school (Hughes and Hindriyati, 1998). No less alarming are the separate stories I heard from several sources about the normalisation of raping Chinese females. In one such story, a schoolgirl asked her classmate: 'Are you Chinese? How come you were not raped?'. In several others, Chinese and other Sinic-looking females passing by public places were interpolated by shouts of 'Rape, rape, rape!'. The Volunteers for

¹⁹ I thank Anthony Reid and Simon Philpot for their separate but similar critiques of my earlier formulation of the same argument.

Humanity documented similar widespread harassment in Jakarta (TRUK, 1998). Discursive practices are mobile and contagious.²⁰

Secondly, acquired discourses at a particular point of their development can be irresistibly compelling. Habitus can be habituating, if not addictive. I like to point this out in attempting to speculate why there should have been such mass gang rapes at all in May 1998, when evidently there was no material or non-material reward to be gained by any of the fragments within the political elite. It is arguable that certain military agents (with or without official instructions) or their proxies took action out of sheer habit, under conducive circumstances, in a combination of crisis, violence and chaos, where almost anything goes.

Barthean *jouissance*, rather than any economic gains or political triumphalism, was probably at the heart of the matter. Rapes had been regular and regulated in the military operation zones of Aceh and East Timor. So why not Jakarta? I am more inclined to accept such a scenario than one of the more conspiracy-oriented theories. The May 1998 rapes proved to be counter productive to the ruling elite during its final days, and perhaps to the succeeding regime. Both before and after the May violence there were public statements from pro-Habibie figures that seemed to endorse the expulsion of ethnic Chinese from the country to allow economic domination by elite *pribumi*.²¹ However, such statements are not adequate evidence to suggest that there was a clear-cut case of successful conspiracy.

It makes some sense to perceive the heavy complicity of security agents in the atrocity as the inevitable 'excesses' of the over-militarised regime of the New Order—a militarism that was imperative for American hegemony during the Cold War, and instrumental to the New Order's three-decade sustained economic growth supervised and applauded by the World Bank and IMF. After 1990, however, the end of the Cold War rendered militarism rapidly

redundant, and New Order obsolete. In that sense, May 1998 appears to be a political hiccup caused by a time-lag. The rampaging officers and rank in file in the final days of Suharto's reign can be compared to the powerful but obsolete dinosaurs that fled from the Lost World of Jurassic Park, invading late 20th century Los Angeles.

A good comparison with late Suharto era facism is ironically the emergence of fascism in Europe. Such comparisons help explain another question of history. If anti-Chinese racism predated the New Order, and de facto military rule transcended law for more than three decades, why is it only in 1998 that we witnessed the mass political rapes of Chinese females on such a scale of magnitude and efficiency? Robert Young (1990:8) contends that European fascism was 'European colonialism brought home to Europe by a country that had been deprived of its overseas empire after World War I'. In long periods of modern history, Western liberal democracy at home has been maintained through violence and oppression abroad (Young, 1990:14). New Order Jakarta had been the home of the glittering success story of economic boom until 1997. The regime knew how to build military masculinity, especially in the outlying areas of Aceh, West Irian and East Timor, but it never quite knew what to do with it in times of crises. In the final days of Suharto's reign the capital city demanded a greater concentration of security personnel than the stubbornly resisting East Timor, West Irian, or Aceh. It brought home not only highly trained officers, but also their 'myths of collective identity and...sedimented memories of threats to the collectivity' (Coronil and Skurski, 1991:289).

The homecoming of special forces of the military to be followed by spectacular violence in 1998 was not the first such incident in the New Order. The 1983 systematic killings of some 5,000 alleged convicts and gangs constitute a precedent (see Bourchier, 1990). Some of the killings were conducted in the homes of the victims in front of their families. Many of the corpses were displayed in the busiest places such as markets, movie houses or street intersections. To reiterate an earlier point, the aesthetic of vulgar visibility of power, rather than political or economic instrumental rationality reigns in Indonesia as in many other post-colonial states. Failure to understand this has led many observers to an impasse in examining a host of questions: the mammoth scale of corruption (not the corruption itself), the nation's ambitious aerospace industry, the scandalous Timor national car industry, the continued war in East Timor, the violent festivity of the New Order's tightly controlled and highly predictable elections, the raiding of the PDI headquarters in 1996, the extended anti-Communist witch-hunt, the multi-million dollar campaign of Pancasila indoctrination, and the excessive scale of mass killings in 1965–66.

²⁰ The call for *reformasi* was loud in Indonesian cities during the first half of 1998. It swept Kuala Lumpur during the second half of the year in ways that surprised both Malaysians and the world outside. The image of Indonesian students occupying the parliament house in Jakarta for a couple of weeks that led to the fall of Suharto's 32 year old reign captured the imagination of many political dissidents in several countries in Asia. Indonesian protesters might have been indebted to the ideas and practices of the Philippine People's Power and South Korea's student and workers' militancy, as well as their own predecessors in the nation.

²¹ Not long before the May 1998 violence Fadli Zon shared with journalist Margot Cohen (1998:16) his vision of a new Jakarta minus the rich Chinese ethnic presence: 'If necessary, we'll go backwards 10 or 15 years...We can start to develop our country without them.' Abdul Qadir Jaelani told interviewer Ivan Haris (1998:80): 'when many Chinese fled the country with US\$80 billion' soon after the May 1998 violence, 'Habibie pleaded them to return. I was angry with Habibie: what for? The fact is they have never been loyal to this Republic.'

Truth, or discourses on truth?

By endorsing the general suspicion of military elements as potential suspects of the May 1998 incident, the previous section also implies an important addition to the list of difficulties for any independent probe into the case, and legal attempts to seek justice. In fact systematic attempts to cover up or drop the case from public discourse were extensive and overt, so that they drew enormous publicity both inside and outside Indonesia.

At a high risk of provoking retaliation from those responsible for the incident, on 13 July 1998 a group of NGO activists presented a preliminary report to the government-appointed National Commission of Human Rights for an official follow-up. These activists belonged to a loosely organised team that came to be known as the Volunteers Team for Humanity, under the leadership of three key figures: Father Sandyawan Sumardi (director of the Institut Sosial Jakarta), Ita Fatia Nadia (Chair of the feminist organisation, Kalyanamitra), and Karlina Supeli-Leksono (Chair of Suara Ibu Perduli or Voice of Concerned Mothers).²² The Volunteers managed to conduct a grounded investigation of the incidents during the riots, and they had the greatest access to the victims and key witnesses afterwards. Their conclusion unmistakably incriminated the security forces.

The Volunteers were not the only NGO activists to conduct investigations, to launch outreach aid programs for the victims and advocate campaigns against the violence.²³ The Volunteers however appeared to have spearheaded the pressures on the government, and to appear most prominently in the emotional controversies that followed. They contended that between 13 May and 13 July 1998, as many as 168 females between the ages of 10 and 50 were gang raped, many suffering mutilation or murder. Nearly all of the victims were ethnic Chinese. Some attacks took place as a spectacle to be watched either coercively by the victims' family, accidentally by passers-by, or consensually by a cheering crowd. Some 138 of those rapes took place in the greater Jakarta area, and most of them (132 cases) occurred on the two days of

²² The name that came to prominence, Volunteers for Humanity, is not exactly inaccurate, given the overlapping responsibilities of the activists in different groups. In this particular instance, these three activists represented the 'Division for Anti-Violence against Women', a task force under the Volunteers for Humanity of the Institut Sosial Jakarta.

²³ Some of the prominent NGOs involved in similar activities include Mitra Perempuan (Women's Partners), Koalisi Perempuan untuk Keadilan dan Demokrasi (Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy), Masyarakat Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan (Society for Anti-Violence against Women) and Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa (National Solidarity).

13 and 14 May 1998 (Sandyawan, 1998a; *Jawa Pos*, 1998a).²⁴ During these two days, 1,200 people were killed, mostly burned in buildings, but 27 from gunfire. The total death toll in various cities as of 9 June 1998 amounted to 2,244 (Sandyawan, 1998b). More than 4,000 shops and shopping malls were burned down, while several thousand vehicles and houses were set afire.

Significantly, but not surprisingly, it was the part of the report on the rapes that shocked the public and generated the strongest reactions. The looting, burning and other attacks paled into insignificance. So did the deaths of around 2,244 persons, most of whom were poor non-Chinese locals. While there is reason to suspect that these were regarded as commonplace and less dramatic than the rapes, it is hard not to take this as reflective of both racial and class biases among those dominating the public forums. It is also an index of the collective forgetting of similar incidents half a century before.

Challenges to minute details of the rape report and outright denials of the occurrence of any rapes emerged in the subsequent months. In the beginning these critical responses were sporadic and ineffective. Individual top government officials were some of the first to question the already well-publicised findings. When they came under heavy attack for being insensitive and inconsiderate to the victims and women in general, they appeared defensive. Within days, and under strong and incessant pressure from angry solidarity groups, the mercurial and newly appointed President B J Habibie made an official pronouncement, admitting that a large number of rapes had taken place during the riots, expressing strong condemnation, and instructing law enforcement agencies to probe into the incident. Several other officials soon followed suit.

However, there were non-governmental groups that condemned the report. Of these groups, the more prominent were Komite Indonesia untuk Solidaritas Dunia Islam (KISDI) and Badan Koordinasi Mubalig se-Indonesia. In different degrees these groups expressed concern that the issue of rape had been blown-up or purely fabricated in attempt to discredit Islam in international forums.²⁵ In the beginning, these critical voices were

²⁴ Figures in this text come from an official report in English from Volunteers for Humanity signed by Father Sandyawan. An Indonesian version of the same document is also available, and signed by Ita Fatia Nadia. Further details about and analysis of the incident are provided in the document. These figures should be read as provisional in a double sense; they require further verification, and they acknowledge incompleteness. Independent investigators were aware that a case could be reported to more than one investigating agency, and these agencies could not thoroughly cross-check the reports due to the anonymity of the sources and the victims.

²⁵ Several weeks prior to the infamous serial killings of around 150 local Muslim leaders in East Java in October 1998, the stronghold of the Nahdlatul Ulama, mysterious mobs attacked the homes and shops of local Muslim leaders on the pretext that they had been supporting the Chinese (*The Straits Times*, 1998).

overshadowed by the national as well as international campaigns for official and credible investigation into the incidents and solidarity for the victims. Increasingly, however, the positions were reversed.

By early August 1998 the Volunteers for Humanity and their sympathisers were made the accused. The question of whether or not any rapes actually took place became the central issue, superseding the earlier questions of who were responsible, how to handle the case with care, or how to assist the victims. Rather than focussing on how the police conducted the investigation, public attention was directed at examining whether or not the Volunteers had fabricated the sensational story, and whether they would be willing and able to persuade the alleged victims to testify in public. When the Volunteers appeared to have become isolated, General Wiranto (Chief Commander of the Armed Forces) and other top government officials began to change their position, joining those who unrelentingly attacked the Volunteers and the validity of their reports.

What reversed the situation was not a disclosure of critical findings. Rather, it was an increase in the aggressive physical abuse, intimidation and life-threats towards members of the Volunteer group and their families. Their request for protection by the police did not meet with the expected response. On the contrary, within a week after the Volunteers launched a press conference out of desperation about the lack of protection long demanded from the police, a new murder took place.

On 9 October 1998, Marthadinata, aged 18, was tortured to death in her home. Key figures within the Volunteers and their sympathisers claimed that the deceased was a member of one of the several voluntary groups assisting those victimised during the May riots. In fact Sandyawan suspected that Marthadinata had been a rape victim in May herself. She was reportedly preparing a trip to the USA to testify about the May 1998 incidents only days prior to her death. Thus there was very little doubt for many activists that the murder was premeditated and politically-motivated. It was a retaliation against what Marthadinata had done for the anti-rape campaign in the past, to prevent her from giving her testimony in the days to come, and more importantly to intimidate the rest of the voluntary activists.

The police denied all the above. They claimed to have caught the murderer and seized the evidence the next day. To counter the Volunteers' account of the murder, already disseminated to the media, the Police conducted three press conferences in less than a week. The Chief Police declared that the murder of Marthadinata was purely criminal. In response to the disbelief of the public, he announced his intention to sue anyone challenging him and 'politicising' the murder. As the Volunteers appeared exhausted and defenceless, what they initially launched as a passionate crusade against 'premeditated' burning, looting, and mass-raping now became an object of mockery and suspicion in some circles. Even when the government-appointed

Fact Finding Joint Team disclosed their report in the first week of November 1998, confirming many of the key points of the Volunteers' earlier report, the controversy did not subside. Neither did the intimidation against the Volunteers.²⁶

While physical assaults and intimidation might have been the major force obstructing efforts to seek justice and truth about the May 1998 rapes, attention should also be paid to a less debated and less recognised problem. Central to the controversy was the verification and validation of the widely-disseminated and hotly debated reports of the May 1998 rapes. Two major allegations were directed at the Volunteers. The first accusation was procedural; they refused to identify the victims' particulars and/or present them to testify in public. The accusing parties would not accept the Volunteers' reasoning that such disclosure constituted a breach of ethics, an abuse of the victims' trust, and endangered the victims' safety, as attested to by the murder of Marthadinata. The other accusation was about the Volunteers' motives, questioning why they had not conducted a similar campaign regarding violence towards and rape of Muslim women in places like Aceh. Rather than calling for investigation campaigns for the rape victims in Aceh, many of these critics appeared to want the Volunteers to be silent on all cases that undermined the legitimacy of the ruling elite. These critics shared state power in both Suharto's final years of rule and in the Habibie presidency.

Two sets of related discourses appeared to have been central in the debates. Both predated the controversy and prevented the Volunteers from achieving their chosen aims and making significant progress in a foreseeable future. One is the moral intensity embedded in discourses on female sexuality, especially on virginity/chastity as discussed earlier. The other concerns the procedures of producing a legitimate truth. As I suggested from the outset, the Indonesian state was not only unwilling to proceed with a legal investigation which would incriminate its own apparatus and undermine its authority, but its agents were also unable to do what the public demanded because of these two dominant discourses.

²⁶ While the well-intended demonstrations by diasporic Chinese communities were not always helpful to the work of the Volunteers, journalistic reporting inside Indonesia was often hostile to them. In response to the report by the Fact Finding Joint Team, the magazine *Panji Masyarakat* (Volume II, No. 31, 18 November 1998) attacked Father Sandyawan by presenting a cover story that questioned his integrity and whether or not he was an agent of the allegedly Chinese-Catholic based and anti-Islamic oriented Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Less crudely, two prestigious newsmagazines *Tempo* (I, 1, 1998) and *Forum Keadilan* (VII, 15, 1998) were commonly unsympathetic to the findings of the Volunteers in general and the position of Father Sandyawan in particular.

The demand for transparency and open examination in order to validate a statement about truth would appear normal in more exclusively academic or legal settings. The specific setting of the May 1998 rape cases strongly reinforced the widespread suspicion that such a demand was more politically-motivated and self-interested than a sincere expression of interest in attaining truth and justice. The demand came mainly from those in intimate relationships with the Habibie government. While the breakdown of the process to achieve an agreed truth could easily be attributed to the peculiar subject matter and political pressures, one should not overstate the distinction of this case from other productions of truth that normalised the demand for the rape report.

The production of all truths that we know today, including those of an academic nature, require some degree of faith of a kind very similar to that which the Volunteers demanded of the public. For various reasons, the canon of authoritative and credible truths stands where it is because of its ability to escape, evade, ignore or suppress challenges highly comparable to those launched against the Volunteers' report. The credibility of any academic statement derives from, and relies on, the credibility of other statements, whose validity cannot and has not been fully exposed, interrogated or refuted. While there are definitely many differences of process and status between an academic statement and a human rights reports, such as that presented by the Volunteers, the difference is not fundamental. Any communicative engagement, from the most combative to the effective, cannot operate without some consensus among the interlocutors, accepting common assumptions, and acknowledging the unseen, unsaid and unsayable.

Any production of truth is reflective of an ongoing battle for power and temporary consensus. Important consensus is often a product of brutal violence, exerted either directly and visibly, or more often through a complex series of mediations such as threats of distant violence and perceived and imaginary threats of potential violence. Thus truths change with time and always remain provisional.

The exact figures and wording of the final report about the May 1998, as presented by the authoritative Fact Finding Joint Team in November 1998, were an interim reflection of ongoing power struggles among forces in post-Suharto Indonesia. At a micro level these struggles included the stamina and perseverance of the Volunteers in facing the extended threats of violent retaliation, and standing by their testimony. The disagreement over the case of May 1998 rapes has the potential to engender a probing of the dominant meta-discourse on the production of legitimate truths. Without such re-examination the Volunteers' testimony and investigative findings (and many others of a

similar kind) will remain less than valid, while the demands of their critics would appear not only legitimate but fair, objective, and natural.²⁷

Remaking ethnicity

This essay began with a sweeping exploration of the difficulties of speaking of and analysing political rapes. These difficulties derive to a large extent from the dominant discourse on the sanctified female virginity/chastity. They also derive partly from the apparent novelty of the incident to many affected Indonesians, partly because of the complexity of agencies, and myths in the production of legitimate truth. If the level of difficulty of dealing with rapes is such that no due justice is feasible under present conditions, what can sympathisers, women's groups and defenders of human rights do or hope to achieve? What have they accomplished thus far?

In this concluding section I wish to address these issues by reflecting on some significant unintended effects of the May 1998 rapes. Briefly, different discourses have unequal positions in competing narratives of the May 1998 incident. Discourse on the ethnic Chinese has not only come to prominence as expected, more significantly it has undergone remarkable changes rather than simply reviving the old prejudices and primordial sentiments. Before closely examining this, it is imperative to recognise the achievements of the human rights and women's rights movements in regard to their intended goals.

The loosely organised movements have staked out a greater space for public demand for more transparency, responsiveness and accountability of state agents. Although they are neither the first nor the sole agents of democratisation, their contribution and accomplishment are nonetheless of historic value. This recognition stands despite there being no illusion that legal justice will be attained and the culprits held responsible. Sadly, while no ammunition for campaigning on women's issues can be greater than that of political gang rapes, and women were definitely one social group that bore the brunt of the May violence, no significant changes are yet visible in the way issues of gender are examined and debated in public. The victimisation of females in the May 1998 events has largely been neutralised or minimised by misrepresenting the rapes as a case of inter-ethnic and latterly inter-religious antagonism.²⁸

²⁷ Feminist literary and other aesthetic works provide a potential site for exploration beyond the impasse of life after rape. See Rajan (1993) for a discussion on this.

²⁸ A non-Chinese woman recounted to me what she heard in a public seminar on the violence against women's held at the Jakarta Arts Council. A man from the audience stated matter-of-factly that the May 1998 rapes did not deserve special attention because the victims were not of 'our people'. I heard similar stories from non-Chinese female academics outside Jakarta who had difficulty getting support from (mostly

The May 1998 violence was historic in the public eye not only for appearing to be the first instance of political gang rape taking place in the centre of the national capital. The event has also been largely, if inaccurately, assumed to constitute the first case where anti-Chinese riots included gang rapes. The May 1998 tragedy became the first instance in many decades where anti-Chinese assault provoked a strong, sustained and cross-ethnic outrage both inside and outside Indonesia. Thus, like the accomplishments of the NGO activists, the solidarity campaign for the Chinese ethnic minority has achieved remarkable success in the symbolic, cultural, moral and political spheres without comparable achievements in legal recourse or material restitution. In order to appreciate the significance of these symbolic accomplishments in historical perspective, a brief review of the fate of ethnic Chinese under Suharto's New Order is necessary.

The New Order was largely a reincarnation of the Dutch colonial regime.²⁹ One of the colonial legacies that Suharto's New Order built on extensively under post-World War capitalism was a divide-and-rule policy towards the ethnic Chinese. Basically it was a paradoxical policy of privileging the Chinese business communities in expanding the nation's economy, and reducing the entire ethnic minority to near pariah status in all social spheres: culture, language, politics, public service and employment, law and education. Consequently, never before had the Chinese business elite enjoyed such abundant wealth as that acquired under Suharto's New Order. Ironically, never before had the ethnic Chinese been so deprived of civil rights.

For the benefit of those less familiar with the subject, let me reiterate some of the often mentioned examples, and add a few details that are less quoted.³⁰ Soon after Suharto assumed power, citizens of Chinese ethnicity were labelled *nonpribumi*, and systematically coerced to assimilate with the locals under state-prescribed programs. The national body politic was to be purged of any traces of Chineseness; the same Chineseness was a state-led construction in the first place (Kemasang, 1985). In the early days of the New Order, Chinese citizens were pressurised to give up personal names, and names of their businesses, and adopt local-sounding names. The extent to which this policy was enforced varied according to many factors: levels of state administration, proximity to the capital city, and the social stature of individuals of Chinese descent. In some areas, local bureaucrats disapproved of newly adopted

male) colleagues to organise meetings and to prepare a public statement in response to the rapes.

International demonstrations and conferences were launched, media analyses and interviews were conducted and new websites were set up disproportionately more in response to the victimisation of an ethnic minority than the humiliation of women.

²⁹ Daniel Lev (1985:72) observes that in one respect (state administration) the 'independent state was not merely similar to the colonial state. It was the same state'.

³⁰ The next few paragraphs are summarised and elaborated from Heryanto (1998a).

personal names, in others bureaucrats decided new names for citizens of this ethnic minority.

No Chinese schools, mass media or social organisation was permitted.³¹ Existing property of these institutions was seized and confiscated without leaving traces in the contemporary history of the nation. Entry to public service, the armed forces and state-run educational institutions was made extremely difficult. With the cosmetic exception of the final few days of the Suharto regime, when Bob Hasan was appointed a minister, no Chinese served as cabinet ministers or high-ranking military service during the New Order, although such service had been regular in previous governments (Anderson, 1990:115). No Chinese dance or New Year celebration was to be seen in public. In the provincial capital of Semarang, even the sale of mooncakes during the Chinese New Year season was declared illegal as late as the early 1990s. Though Hong Kong kungfu movies were widely popular throughout the New Order, printed matter in Chinese characters fell under the same category of prohibited imports as narcotics, pornography and explosives when entering Indonesian territory. I heard reports from the 1960s about a Javanese city where Chinese citizens were slapped in public if caught speaking in Mandarin even privately.

It is not difficult then to imagine the extremely odd position of the Chinese, whose top elite enjoyed economic privileges, but most of whom had no legitimate rights for assembly, speech or representation in public life. Both sides of the paradox make them an easy target of racial and class hostility among those disaffected by the New Order's authoritarianism. With varying degrees of magnitude and frequency, anti-Chinese attacks had been regular throughout Suharto's New Order. Such rioting served the interest of the New Order regime in multiple ways: it deflected public anger; it assured that the economically powerful Chinese did not convert their economic power into political independence and opposition; and it provided the pretexts for state agents to make periodic arrests and prosecutions of potential dissidents among the local *pribumis*. Paradoxically, selected groups among Suharto's opponents also found anti-Chinese riots one of the remaining means to mobilise the urban masses and challenge the status-quo within the largely repressed environment.

Understandably, state-sponsorship of major anti-Chinese riots was more of a standard practice than exception, by passive prior endorsement if not more active participation.³² Such rehearsals were in fact necessary to reproduce the

³¹ For propaganda purposes, the military continued the sole publication of a Chinese daily (see report by Cohen, 1998b).

³² By major riots I refer to those raging in several cities for more than two consecutive days without any significant response from the security forces. Disclosure of evidence that state forces might be responsible for the May 1998 rioting was often presented as

divide-and-rule system that gave the New Order (as much as its colonial predecessor) its sustained domination. In the days following such riots, the Chinese adult males were usually summoned and blamed for the riots that cost their own fortunes. Local government officials and military officers told them how to correct their attitudes and behaviour towards the local *pribumi*, and the nation—treatment that was also given to survivors of the 1965–66 massacres, to sexually abused women, and to resistant East Timorese activists.

Against this backdrop, reactions to the anti-Chinese violence in May 1998 would seem to represent a big historical advance. They would have been unimaginable a few years ago. Rather than straightforwardly defending state-constructed ethnicity, some of these reactions significantly undermined the official ethnic division. They practically deconstructed racial essentialism, although the old residual racism and essentialism are still alive among both Chinese and non-Chinese ethnic communities. Condemnation of the racial attacks came most strongly from non-Chinese Indonesians, who were in any case better represented in public. Meanwhile, those officially labelled as members of the Chinese community were divided on many important issues pertaining to their common victimisation. Admittedly, this new phenomenon did not take place overnight (see Heryanto, 1998a).

Two unprecedented reactions of the Chinese communities to the attacks were neighbourhood armed vigilantes and ethnic-based political parties.³³ While these parties barely had any importance beyond the symbolic, and were received with cynicism from both Chinese and non-Chinese fellow citizens; significantly there was no attempt to destroy their right to associate, as would have been the case 15 or 20 years earlier. Ordinary Chinese males and females of all ages were reportedly participating in public gatherings to discuss national politics (*Suara Merdeka*, 1998).

More conscious of their problematic identity, Chinese Indonesians have also been embroiled in an endless debate about the use of *Cina* or *Tionghoa* to make self-reference.³⁴ The work of NGO activists in litigation, investigation

if it was new or unusual. Rather than asking whether or not there was any systematic state-sponsorship of the May 1998 violence, as many have done, one should investigate whether or not the state agencies of successive governments were innocent in any of the hundreds of cases of anti-Chinese pogroms, looting and arson throughout the century.

³³ See pictures and reports in the cover story of *Far Eastern Economic Review* (1998).

³⁴ The debate is symptomatic of the prevalent ahistorical and instrumental paradigms in Indonesia, both of which are complicit in the problems that erupted in May 1998. One such paradigm is political-economic pragmatism or instrumentalism, and the other is racial essentialism. Those demanding the abolition of 'Cina' and call for a return to pre-New Order, non-derogatory word for Chinese, 'Tionghoa' imply that meanings reside in the sign once for all. Those accepting the New Order's initially

or aiding the victims of the May 1998 involved Indonesians of mixed ethnicities, genders and religions. Leadership was mostly in the hands of non-Chinese. The same is true with the prolific cultural and intellectual events that drew on Indonesian Chinese cultural heritage not in exclusive occasions but as integral parts of diverse programs including other ethnic, national and global cultures. In the euphoria of *reformasi* in the months following the fall of Suharto which was also the height of fear among Chinese communities, urban-based middle class artists, intelligentsia and activists took initiatives to liberate the long-suppressed cultural heritage of Chinese Indonesians.

The banned *Barongsay* (Chinese dragon dance), for instance, was repeatedly performed in several cities soon after the May 1998 riots, including the occasion of the establishment of a local branch of the Partai Amanat Nasional (National Mandate Party) led by one of the two most important Muslim opposition figures Amien Rais (*Kompas*, 1998b). Earlier, on 6 June 1998, barely two weeks after Indonesia saw one of the worst anti-Chinese riots in 18 years, the *Barongsay* was performed within the series of cultural events at the Ganesha Festival, sponsored by the Bandung Institute of Technology. It was followed by Sundanese music and dance performed by Chinese Indonesians. The *Barongsay* was also performed, along with the Javanese folk dance *Reyog Ponorogo*, at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Surabaya on 25 September 1998.

Another significant event was the initiative of three NGOs to reprint of Pramudya Ananta Tur's *Hoakiao di Indonesia* (1998). The work had been banned since 1960 (the author was jailed for writing the book) but this ban was simply ignored when the new reprint was launched on 21 October 1998. Previously, the other influential Muslim figure in the country, Abdurrahman Wahid, claimed to have Chinese ancestry (*Jawa Pos*, 1998b). In such a situation, some of the emotional campaigns outside Indonesia in solidarity for the Chinese victims in Indonesia looked a little incongruous or anachronistic. Those campaigns and the racialising media coverage of the May 1998 violence simply fed each other in mutually-referential cycles. B J Habibie's presidential decree of 16 September 1998 to abolish the use of *pribumi/nonpribumi* in all public administration could perhaps only impress some of the poorly-informed solidarity groups outside Indonesia.

In summary, although there is no certainty about how far the new phenomenon will continue to develop and in which direction, the status and identity of the ethnic Chinese in the post-Suharto era will never be the same again. What is currently developing does not take the direction of essentialist ethnisation of multi-culturalism à la Singapore or Malaysia, or the New

intended derogatory term 'Cina' argue that signs are empty in themselves, void of any historical values and haunting memories.

Order's version of the Indonesian national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as manifested in the theme park Taman Mini Indonesia Indah. One possible scenario of the future is further commodification of Chineseness both in political rhetoric and the entertainment industry. Instead of being an essentialised, embodied identity that comes with birth, Chineseness (or Javanese, Balinese, and so on) may refer to nothing but new trends in garment fashion, architecture, film genre, cuisine, dance, or one of the several tourist destinations in post-crisis capitalism.

Unfortunately, but not very surprisingly, no comparable developments have taken place with regard to sexual discrimination and gender construction, despite the glaringly sexualised dimension of the May 1998 atrocities.³⁵ As the centuries old anti-Chinese racism and racialisation of Indonesia have met new challenges, religion has increasingly become the battleground for new political interests and opportunists. Approximately 400 churches were torched by suspicious mobs between 1993 and 1998 (Head, 1998). Gender issues remain marginal and are made negligible to many. Many people actually misunderstood or ignored the issues.³⁶

To some degree, the indifference to gender issues is reflected in and made possible by the general public forgetting or misrecognising of everyday forms of sexual abuse and rape, and the political mass rapes of Chinese females half a century ago. Rapes and gender subordination do not only have multiple victims and sites of mediated victimisation as discussed earlier, they also have multiple perpetrators and mediated endorsements that facilitate the erasure of collective memory of that past. The general tendency to ignore, marginalise or reduce gender issues to those of race or state-civil society is one mechanism

³⁵ This is not to misrecognise or belittle the various campaigns by women's solidarity groups across the country. They mobilised and radicalised more men and women's for a while, but by and large they did not alter the main discourse on gender subordination, especially during the tumultuous time of multi-dimensional crises.

³⁶ In early November 1998, the fairly prestigious Kongres Umat Islam Indonesia (Congress of the Indonesian Islamic Community) proposed to the law makers that women's and non-Muslims be excluded from presidential and vice-presidential candidacy (*Kompas*, 1998a). The recommendation most likely targeted a specific individual (the most threatening presidential candidate, Megawati Sukarnoputri), rather than the subordinated gender and religious minorities. The significance of the statement is the ease with which gender subordination was presented as something given, and normal. While it is unlikely that the recommendation will gain sufficient support and be legally enforced, one cannot underestimate what gave that particular statement its ease and claimed authority. Towards the end of November, one group of the most militant student protestors humiliated the Attorney-General (for failing to give a due date for their legal investigation of former President Suharto's acquired wealth) by presenting him with a hen.

in this process.³⁷ The potential fruits of the admirable work of women's groups and human rights activists in 1998 can be appreciated in this sense. These activists may not deliver restitution to the victims of the May 1998 rapes, but they make it harder for the world of men and women to forget half a century from now what happened in May 1998, at least harder to let the atrocity recur with equal ease or scale.

³⁷ Artists and writers of fiction appeared to have been more responsive to the gender issues (see *Suara Pembaruan*, 1998; Fadji and Idyanic, 1998).

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